The Supporter Journey

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# Table of Contents

**Introduction: Foreword by Marc Chardon and Hal Williams**
Supporter Shift: Engaging Tomorrow's Donor ........................................ v

**Chapter One: Analyze and Identify**
Three Steps to Understanding Prospects and Supporters......................... 1

**Chapter Two: Segment and Target**
Strategies for Segmentation........................................................................ 9

**Chapter Three: Engage and Communicate**
Improving Communication, Engagement, and Giving Via a Multichannel Approach......................................................................................... 17

**Chapter Four: Appreciate and Retain**
Let Your Constituents' Feedback Be Music to Your Ears............................ 25

**Chapter Five: Measure and Manage**
Stop Counting. Start Measuring. Achieve Meaningful Outcomes............ 35

**About the Authors** .................................................................................. 42
Introduction

Supporter Shift: Engaging Tomorrow’s Donor

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As the CEO of a company that works exclusively with nonprofit organizations, I spend a lot of time listening to the challenges you face and thinking about how technology innovation can turn those challenges into opportunities.

I approach this introspection from multiple perspectives — as an economist, a Baby Boomer, and the father of two Millennials. For me, each point of view provides a way for me to look at and consider what I’m seeing in the world around me. And if you’re like me, you’re seeing rapid change that is pushing every kind of institution to rethink what it does, how it does it, and what the organization is – what it truly wants and needs to be – at its core.

Looking specifically at nonprofits along with Hal Williams, an expert in outcomes, we collectively see organizations grappling with a phenomenon we call supporter shift. Supporter shift, as we define it, is the change (either current or inevitable) in the composition of the group of people who care enough about your organization to help support its purpose.

It seems everyone is investing a lot of time talking about generations, us included. It is a simple fact that, as people age, different generations have their proverbial moments in the sun when it comes to leadership and, thinking like a nonprofit, the ability to give significant donations. But supporter shift is about more than age. It’s also largely a result of the ever-increasing speed of change over the past few decades and a generational shift in values and priorities.

Although our grandparents and parents witnessed many incredible innovations — the airplane, the microwave oven, and the hand-held...
calculator to name just a few — technology innovation (and adoption) has continued to outdo itself. Consider this data from Socialnomics. It took 38 years for the radio to reach 50 million users. TV hit the same milestone in 13 years. The Internet only took four. And Facebook®, twice as many people — that’s 100 million users — signed on within nine months of launch.

A key question then becomes, do you really know your supporters? Do you know how they define themselves and their connection to your brand? A large, sophisticated nonprofit recently ran a trial, testing their own knowledge of their supporters. They coded, in their systems, the relationships they felt people had with the organization. Then, they reached out to the individuals themselves and asked, “Were we right?” No, they weren’t. Between 40-60 percent categorized themselves differently, in their primary category, than the organization did. And in another year, these same supporters will have changed, self-defining in a new way. This is another one of those scary data points that reminds us we don’t know as much as we think we do and alerts us to the need to keep up, keep in touch, keep track of the change occurring around us. After all, if we don’t know who our supporters are, how can we fulfill their search for meaning?

What does engagement really mean to today’s supporters? For Boomers like us, we’re focused on giving both money and expertise, teaching nonprofits the best practices we learned in our professional lives. We seek to tie donations of money with donations of time, helping to create results-driven output. In many cases we also want to learn — new awareness, new skills, new thinking. The social venture philanthropy movement is an example of this and, at its best, has strong personal discovery going in both directions.

For our children, it’s about advocating, volunteering (as traditionally defined and also through the rather newer concept of micro-volunteering), championing your cause, using “social currency” on your behalf by leveraging their social networks (which they may or may not tell you about), and, at some point, donating money themselves. At the core of whatever
they choose to do — because it will very much be their choice — is a search for meaning.

Today’s supporter seeks to engage with your organization, your brand in a new way. They will expect, in an age where their iPhones™ have become the nerve center of their worlds, the experience (whatever it is) to align around them, not the other way. They will expect you to know them, to “get what they’re about,” and to offer them opportunities to steer the somewhat fluid form this journey will take. If you opt not to respond to them, they’ll move on. This is a reality that may actually run counter to the mindset of contributor treatment, where donors are treated in classes instead of as individuals. If one donor drops out, another one is found so the class and contributions hold up. With individual supporters, the effort to know something about them personally versus by their group is what most impresses. And individuals are far more quirky than categories.

Today, individuals have a driving need to be connected, to be engaged, to participate in a conversation around their lives and experiences, and to drive the conversation from wherever they happen to be. To engage them, nonprofits need to take a broader view. The back office must leave “donor management” behind in place of creating and cultivating a far more complex and interactive supporter journey. Donors need to be cultivated and thanked. Supporters need to be engaged.

Stepping back for a minute, you might ask, “What’s different these days in how people are interacting and what they’re expecting?”

• First, communication and information seeking are happening in real time.

• Second, the greatly shortened message size enforced by tools like Twitter® leaves us little room to be abstract. Users get to the point, quickly. Conversation is more literal and honest.

• Third, responsiveness is expected, all the time. After all, if we can ask for information in real time, we also expect an answer right back.
All of this means that we can no longer treat supporters like we treated donors, as episodic participants (“It’s the time of year we ask for money or send a report.”) The good news is that the time spent in building and participating in engagement can pay off handsomely.

Nonprofits want donors. They depend on volunteers. They need ambassadors. And they require participants willing to change their behavior to get to the human gain they are committed to achieving. Only one kind of person can play many if not all of these roles. That person is your supporter. They are foremost your prospects for volunteering and can often help (within a careful structure) do jobs now done by paid staff, at times with more energy. They are ambassadors with not only belief but also credibility. They have led by personal example. And they can become your participants. Susan G. Komen for the Cure® has an annual race hosted by its Triangle NC affiliate to support breast cancer programs, research, and prevention. They are about to ask all 25,000 participants to commit personally to getting a breast cancer screening annually and ask a friend to do so, as well. That’s a significant number toward program success.

In the end, if you cultivate true supporters, you will end up with brand ambassadors who amplify your message, who give their time and money, and who become “friendraisers” for you. The supporter and the purpose will become intertwined, and your organization will be the beneficiary of the resulting passion.

Like it or not, the Boomers won’t be in charge forever. Members of Generation X — often that lost group we fail to talk about while being so enamored of the groups that bookend it — are stepping into leadership roles as thousands of Boomers leave the work force daily. Millennials are not far behind, beginning to show what they can do, the impact they can make, and how different they are. As this shift happens in the world, supporter shift is happening in your organization. The degree to which it will help or hurt you is up to you and the investment you make in understanding your younger supporters…and the long journey they might…could…should…make with you.
One

Analyze and Identify

Three Steps to Understanding Prospects and Supporters
Chapter One

Analyze and Identify: Three Steps to Understanding Prospects and Supporters

by Michael Quevli

When I think about the series of events that led me into fundraising, I always feel good about the work I do and the people I am fortunate enough to work with on a daily basis. My career is focused on development research, an integral part of any successful fundraising effort. Regardless of the degree of formality of research within your organization, you must realize that knowing more about your supporters will always help to establish more meaningful relationships. Acquiring that knowledge must permeate everything you do.

By way of example: Early in my career, I attended a meeting with one of my organization’s gift officers and a major donor prospect. During the meeting, the officer asked the individual for a gift of $10,000. Much to the surprise of the gift officer, the individual seemed upset by the request, and while he did make the gift, he did not appear pleased about it. Somewhat confused about what had happened, after the meeting, I did some research of my own on the donor. What I discovered reconfirmed my burgeoning belief in the importance of knowing prospective donors. I learned the donor not only had the capability to give $100,000, but he also had the desire. He had relationships with some of our other six-figure donors and had wanted to be a part of that group. Not only had we left money on the table, we had disrespected a potential major donor. It is a lesson that has stayed with me to this day and underscores the importance of knowing your donors.

I am always amazed at the wide range of research operations I see when I work with nonprofits, and I have learned that whether the efforts are formal or informal, sophisticated or grassroots, there are some best practices...
that any nonprofit can use to analyze their prospects and identify their best donors. I’ve summarized these best practices into three steps to help you better engage with your best prospects — those who truly want to support your organization and have the ability to do so. If you follow these three steps, you will empower everyone in your organization to build and maintain better constituent relationships throughout the supporter lifecycle.

**Step One: Start with Your Database**

To establish a mutually respectful relationship with donors, you have to know them. You have to have what I refer to as a three-dimensional view of each of your targeted constituents. To begin the process of learning about your prospects, begin by analyzing the information in your database. From it, you can uncover your best annual, major, and planned giving donors.

Let’s start with a baseline fact: To be successful, you have to capture as many pieces of information about your supporters as possible. This cannot be overstated — it is a level of commitment that has to flow across your entire organization if you are to acquire the complete and accurate data you need.

From there, make a commitment to keep the basic contact information you have about your supporters up to date so you can adopt the multichannel communication strategies that today’s constituents expect. That’s a challenge in itself when you consider that more than 40 million people in the U.S. move every year and an untold number change their email addresses. But even then, you have to know more. You have to understand your contacts’ interests and relationships to both your organization and other organizations.

Looking at an entire database is, of course, an overwhelming task, so begin by segmenting it to prioritize, or tier, your prospects. This allows you to focus on your best potential supporters.
What is the best way to get started with segmentation? In my experience, predictive modeling is the best place to start, provided you have good data. Basically, predictive modeling uses software models based on past donor characteristics and behaviors to predict future donor actions. The results you get from modeling will allow development staff to do what they do best: focus on building relationships with the best potential donors. Predictive modeling is discussed in more depth in the next chapter.

**Step Two: Identify and Qualify Prospects**

The bottom line is that you want to know which prospects deserve your time and energy. Coupling your segmentation and modeling strategy with a deeper dive into your best prospects is a winning combination for many successful fundraising organizations.

Let’s discuss evaluating the philanthropic capacity of each of your identified prospects. This can be done through prospect research, wealth screening, or a combination of both. In general, prospect research is a much lengthier process than wealth screening and does not produce a larger number of prospects in this initial identification and qualification stage. I have found that wealth screening allows you to identify a greater number of prospects and frees the development team to focus on other duties.

Once you have identified key prospects and assigned them to a gift officer or development staff member, it is time to qualify your donors. This is not the time to attempt to create a full profile, although as a researcher myself, I know it is tempting. You have to stay focused on getting enough information to qualify the donor. Ideally, you now have contact information, historical giving to the institution, and basic capacity of the prospect. Knowing the donor’s hobbies, children’s names and schools, interests, etc. are not essential at this point of the process. That will come in the next step. For now, you want to confirm affinity, interest, and basic capacity. You may have some of this information from predictive modeling, but you should also review internal documents and other knowledge you
have on the prospect. Then, complete a wealth screening that includes comprehensive real estate information and business asset data mining. This should only take you about 15 minutes. Keep in mind that data confidence is a largely human endeavor, so you should plan on confirming your data from a prospect screening as part of a successful research process.

Begin by reviewing your prospect’s real estate data. Be sure to look at the details of the holdings, asking yourself the following questions:

- Are there additional properties to confirm? Look at the property that is already confirmed and see how it is listed. Now examine the identified additional property and see if it matches up to the confirmed residence. If there appears to be no new buyer, then in most cases you can confirm the data rather quickly.

- Does the property valuation seem accurate? Obtain this from your knowledge of the area or by using tools such as Zillow® or Yahoo!® comparable market value data.

- How long has the prospect owned the properties? In the past, we would discount an individual for a recent property purchase due to a high mortgage, but I have changed my focus on this slightly. Remember, banks are no longer granting outrageous loans/mortgages to individuals, so if a prospect has recently purchased a one million dollar property, I am willing to believe they have not only the capability but the assets to afford such a home. A recent purchase can also mean the home was purchased at the lower end of the value and when prices go back up it will gain in value. If the prospect has owned the home for some time, the mortgage is probably lower and the home worth more than when it was purchased.

- When was the purchase made? The date of a real estate purchase can be a key consideration when evaluating assets because, if the property was purchased in 2000 or earlier, it is likely the property is not “under water.” It is also a good bet that the owners were able to
refinance their homes at the extraordinary low interest rates that have been available. This can result in available cash.

Next, review business assets, asking yourself the following questions:

- Are there additional businesses to confirm? As in real estate, most screening services will bring back not only businesses that are confirmed as connected to the prospect but also those where there was not enough match criteria to conclusively determine the connection. This can be a business held by a spouse, a subsidiary of the main company, or differently incorporated businesses that fall under the primary company.

- Is it a private or public company and what type of company? Dun & Bradstreet (D&B®) is still one of the best resources for obtaining private company information. In most D&B files, you will see a Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) code that will help us understand the nature of the business. While a private company does not have to file with D&B (or report anything publically), most file for a credit rating with their vendors, but since it is not mandatory, don’t assume your prospect has no business connections if not listed here. Companies are not required to update their D&B file on a regular basis so that should be taken into consideration. At this point, it is good to check to see if the company has a website and to bookmark it for additional research. While on the site, note the job title of the prospect and company sales if provided. This can be very telling. If the prospect is an insider— someone who owns 10 percent or more in a company, is one of the top five executives, or is on the board of directors — look for the last date of transaction to determine if your prospect is still connected to the company.

- When you understand what a donor owns publically, it is time to think of what his or her private stock portfolio looks like. Don’t dismiss a prospect if the data is old or if not a great deal of stock is owned. If a person has been an insider at some point, you should consider
them. In most wealth screenings, the detail of stock ownership can be obtained. Look briefly at the direct and indirect stock ownership. Direct stock ownership means the stock is held in the prospect’s name; indirect stock can be held by a spouse, foundation, child, etc.

At this point, it’s time to stop. Remember, you are only identifying and qualifying prospects. Once the prospect moves into the cultivation stage, you can spend time researching the details. I know it’s not always easy because uncovering information about your prospects is exciting. And, yes you can do all of this in 15 minutes!

It’s now time to pick up the phone or send an email to your qualified prospect. Once he or she has agreed to a meeting and expressed an interest, you can move onto step three.

**Step Three: Finalize the Three-Dimensional View of Your Prospect**

When you meet with a prospect or donor, document everything you can, including interests and hobbies. You will be amazed at what the slightest detail can uncover. For example, adding a middle initial to a profile can change the capacity of a prospect drastically especially when your prospect has a common name.

After the meeting, circle back with the prospect research or management person on your staff and share what you have learned. This is a necessary and strategic approach. As you review the data consider these two questions: What is the data telling me? What is the data not telling me? Then, take action on both fronts until you are satisfied that you have a complete profile of your donor.

**Know Before You Go**

With the intense competition for donors, you can’t afford to under- or overestimate a prospect’s capacity and affinity. If you take the time to
develop a three-dimensional view of your individual constituents, you can avoid making unnecessary mistakes. In fact, once you have developed a profile of your best prospects you will know what to ask, when to ask, and how to ask because you will know what it is about your mission that engages each of the donors you’ve qualified.
Segment and Target
Strategies for Segmentation
“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”
George Santayana

This often quoted phrase serves as a somewhat surprising, yet apt introduction for the topic of segmenting and targeting your supporters. If we do not understand the history of our organizational relationships to our supporters, we will indeed repeat mistakes in our interactions with them, to the detriment of the organization and its mission. Many of the fundraising practices we currently employ originated decades ago and are based on incomplete or inaccurate data and subsequent adherence to tradition. How can this be, you ask, when so many organizations are able to reach annual goals?

There are a number of reasons for this; first and foremost is that the goal setting process itself is flawed. Our reliance on short-term goals based on incremental improvements in annual revenue may exceed expectations, but what if expectations are based on an incomplete understanding of donor potential, donor maturation, and fundraising practices that often distance our best future prospects from our mission? Then, our incomplete view of “success” clouds a true vision of potential.

Furthermore, the fact that most, if not all, of our fundraising efforts overlap ensures that if we take a program-by-program view of best practices, rather than a comprehensive, cross-discipline approach, we may neglect the benefits of proactive change. For example, we may use data mining to determine that 70 percent of our annual donors give once annually. However, if we fail to reduce our annual solicitations to this group (perhaps
from 12 to two or three) or change the substance of our communications (to emphasize more cultivation than solicitation), we miss the opportunity to craft stronger relationships.

When you have finished this chapter on the journey, I hope that you will agree that better knowledge leads to best practices for data-driven prioritization and, ultimately, greater results.

**All Prospects Are Created Equal, But …**

Philanthropic interests and passions are born, grow, and change over the lifetime of our donors. Loyal donors to environmental causes, for example, may choose not to give to local hospitals at present, but may add these organizations later in life as healthcare becomes more personal to them. There are an infinite number of possibilities, yet once someone becomes a first-time donor or perhaps a lapsed donor, we nonetheless tend to treat everyone in that group in a similar fashion. And that is an unnecessary error.

Today’s research methods — data mining, predictive modeling, and others — allow us to drill deeper into the categories of donors at all levels and gift types, as well as non-donors, volunteers, and prospects. These research techniques sharpen our supporter profiles, enabling us to cultivate and solicit more efficiently and effectively. These methods have also allowed us to disprove assumptions that have been part of the fundraising landscape for decades:

**Myth 1.** Wealth and capacity analysis alone trump likelihood to give.

**Myth 2.** Top-down prospect identification yields the largest number of mid- and long-term major and planned giving donors.

**Myth 3.** More donors equal greater fundraising success.

**Myth 4.** The number of gifts a donor makes annually signifies greater future giving potential.
How do we dispel these assumptions? As suggested earlier, we use the diagnostic tools available to us to turn conjecture into fact. By using the right strategies for segmentation, we can identify your best giving prospects. Here are a few research paths that I suggest you follow:

1. Our research suggests that wealth and capacity screening, although an important component of prospect rankings, is not enough. Predictive modeling, in the form of a major gift model, will identify three or four times as many prospects as pure hard asset listings. So, if you want to generate the most from your prospect screening efforts, you should first identify your best prospects through modeling and then supplement the model results with wealth data and capacity.

2. Research also indicates that the majority of the donors rise to the middle and top of your ultimate giving pyramid from the lower levels of giving. This is why top-down prospect identification is limiting; it is based on discovering prospects after they have already arrived at their destination, as opposed to during their journey.

3. The secret to raising more money is retaining the donors you have, as it is far easier to grow commitments from loyal donors than to begin anew each year. Begin by understanding the character of retained donors through data mining and modeling, and then use your knowledge to refine your acquisition plan. If you are able to retain half of a targeted acquisition pool of 6,000, it may be better than retaining 50 percent of an amorphous pool of 10,000 new donors. It will yield more gift revenue in the long run and cost far less in lapsed donor efforts in the short term.

4. Combine ongoing data mining with sophisticated prospect screening to ensure knowledge of your database potential. Fundraising is a process, it is ongoing, and the discovery of the information on your prospects and donors must be as well. Here are some suggestions for you to track and analyze annually:
The Supporter Journey

a. Analyze how many of your assigned prospects were visited in the past twelve months and how many of them donated to your organization. Track whether their giving was greater, the same, or less than the previous year. If identified prospects are not being cultivated and are not giving at major giving levels, this is a clear indication that it is time to re-evaluate.

b. Evaluate the content of your current donor pool to determine how many of them increased giving (positive trajectory), maintained giving (neutral trajectory), decreased giving (negative trajectory), are new donors, or are lapsed donors. Think of this as the blood pressure of your fundraising program. It must be monitored regularly to determine the health of your organization.

c. Look at longitudinal data to determine the age of your donors by giving level along with the number of years it takes donors to move from one gift level or club to another, or from annual giving to mid-level giving, and mid-level to major giving. Furthermore, consider this data to determine the percentage of consistent donors who give once annually, segmented by those in that group who give at the same time every year. How many times do you solicit the donors who give once annually at the same time every year? Perhaps it is time to test a cost-saving approach.

The good news is when your segmentation strategy begins with a well-designed predictive statistical model, you’re on a proven path to effective prioritization of the contacts in your database — not just those whose wealth profiles or giving histories suggest they are good prospects. This will enable you to get a more complete picture of who is most likely to give, their ultimate gift potential, and what kind of appeal you should use. With this information in hand, you will save valuable time and money by focusing appeals on those most likely to contribute to your organization specifically.
Love the Loyal

In the early days of building predictive modeling services for nonprofits, I was hoping to prove that there were two separate concepts — likelihood to give and capacity to give — that we could statistically combine in different ways to rank our prospects and understand the giving choices they were most likely to make. I believed that likelihood, also known as affinity, inclination, or propensity to give offered us more insight into future behavior than capacity.

Fortunately for me, two of my colleagues, Jennifer Key and Hans Engebretson, applied a variety of statistical methodologies that did not reflect my biases but served to prove the original hypothesis. Of course, the critical component of likelihood to give is loyalty, which may be demonstrated in a variety of forms. It is disappointing to me and often surprising to others, that, in spite of the critical connection loyalty has with giving, the simple art of recognizing or thanking loyal donors is often overlooked. Consider these three examples:

1. Electronic media has changed the way in which we publicly recognize gifts. Websites and emails have been added to donor honor rolls and annual reports. Whatever the medium, the message focuses on the individuals, couples, families, foundations, and corporations making gifts at the top of the donor pyramid. The power of change inherent in a mega-gift is awe inspiring and the potential for inspiration in their recognition is limitless. The mega-gifts of loyal donors, those who are low-to-mid level habitual contributors and form the backbone of your organization, are often planned gifts. It is a fact beyond refutation: loyalty is directly linked to ultimate planned giving behavior. But, do we tell the story of these loyal donors and their planned giving commitments? Sometimes we do, but not nearly as much as we should. The more frequently we share these great
stories of selflessness, the more we encourage other similarly situated individuals to do the same.

2. You might assume that loyalty encourages lots of thanking from nonprofits, yet what is the one thing that we do most consistently with our loyal donors? We solicit them much more often than we thank them. That’s a mistake; it’s not that hard to say thank you. Anyone in your organization—service provider, administrator, board member or volunteer—can do it. Well-timed phone calls or hand-written notes are simple strategies to building relationships that last and grow.

3. There is a disturbing trend in the industry, one that eliminates personalized thank you notes for donors below a certain dollar level. Many of your best ultimate donor prospects give less than $100 annually. Do you really want to thank them with a receipt?

As you can see by these examples, I am a big fan of loyal donor recognition and a firm believer in the power of donor loyalty to predict future giving. But keep in mind, there are many other forms of loyalty beyond just giving that indicate engagement with your organization. Loyalty may include: membership, event attendance, subscriptions, ticket buying, volunteerism, or advocacy.

My colleague, Chuck Longfield, has observed that even very simple behaviors may be strong indicators of loyalty or passion. The example he often cites is the donor/prospect who reaches out to your organization to provide you a new address upon relocation. This simple act of courtesy is also a not-so-subtle statement of caring for your cause.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not offer a thought about the concept of “years of consecutive giving.” Of course we want our donors to give at least once annually, but we know that if they miss a year or two here and there (particularly if it is sporadic), it does not adversely affect ultimate giving behavior. If you track consecutive years of giving and publicly recognize it, practice forgiveness for a year missed. And also remember that donors think
and act on a calendar year schedule: a gift in January 2010 and another in July 2011 happen in consecutive calendar years but miss the 2010-2011 fiscal year. Would you agree that they remain loyal to your mission?

**Data Modeling Delivers**

Mining your prospect data is a key to success. Modeling factors in the strength of each individual’s relationship with your organization, such as whether they volunteer regularly, purchase season tickets every year, or sit on your board of directors. It will identify and rank the best prospects in your database, whether or not they have already given to your organization. This will enable you to better understand your donors’ and non-donors’ relationships with your organization. Once you have the information, you can target your efforts accordingly by turning that knowledge and your creativity into fundraising results.
Engage and Communicate

Improving Communication, Engagement, and Giving Via a Multichannel Approach
Chapter Three

Engage and Communicate: Improving Communication, Engagement, and Giving Via a Multichannel Approach

by Allison Van Diest

There is no doubt that direct mail gifts comprise the overwhelming majority of fundraising revenue, so it makes sense that direct mail initiatives receive the lion’s share of focus and resources. But as marketers and fundraisers look for new ways to keep current supporters engaged while reaching out to new prospective supporters, many of them are discovering that there is an opportunity to adopt a strategic multichannel approach to communication. If your organization hasn’t considered expanding its outreach strategy, it may be time to look at how online and offline work can compliment your current fundraising channels. With multichannel marketing, you can improve overall giving.

While every organization communicates through email, direct mail, telephone, tabletops, and events, coordinated and thoughtful multichannel marketing is still rare. In most organizations, limitations in technology and constraints in an organization’s culture often arise:

- Technology limitations: Creative and logistical program management for targeted, multichannel marketing programs can become overwhelming quickly. Additionally, program management tools that are typically used to automate parts of the creative and logistical process as well as to properly segment, test, store, measure success, and iterate the package typically require excessive training and are difficult to use.

- Cultural constraints: Instead of having centralized marketing and fundraising teams that work closely together, these teams often work in isolation and often by the channel through which they are assigned to communicate.
Overcoming these common obstacles is a challenge, but once an organization is able to do so, it will be better prepared to explore how to improve overall giving through a multichannel approach. Here are some ideas that will help you create new opportunities for your organization.

Make it Simple and Fulfilling for New Donors to Give Online

New donor acquisition via online giving has nearly doubled in the last five years, but the actual number of newly acquired donors overall has decreased 3.6 percent per year over the same time period.¹ This decline represents a mix of factors including the economy, a changing generational profile in the U.S., the changing attitudes of donors about giving, and a change in focus by fundraisers toward higher-dollar donors. It may also be a reflection of the fact that the majority of donor acquisition occurs via direct mail.

Currently, the average age of donors for many organizations is high. Figuring out how to attract a new generation of donors is therefore a critical initiative for nonprofits. Online communications with donors may help. Research reveals that new online donors are younger, have higher incomes, and give much larger gifts than mail-acquired donors.

We know that most potential donors check out an organization via the Internet before making a gift — either online or offline. More than 62 percent will visit the nonprofit’s website, while another 59 percent will research it through independent news sources.² Assuming they like what they find — which requires a professional, content-rich website that clearly articulates the organization’s purpose and invites visitors to get involved — how easy is it for them to express support? Today’s audience expects far more than an easy to locate “Donate Now” button. Excellent websites speak to the needs of their visitors. To see if your site accomplishes that goal, use an audience analysis exercise.

- First, develop personae to represent each major website audience segment. Enlist actual representatives of that sample or put yourself in
their shoes. Review the site to determine a visitor’s level of difficulty in achieving each call to action. How intuitive is the site’s navigation? How many clicks are required to achieve the objective? Does content along the path support the call to action or distract from it? Once the visitor arrives at the form, how user friendly is it? Online communication should be directed to a specific target audience and feature a meaningful call to action, which should be straightforward to execute.

- Next ask, “Once the call to action has been fulfilled, how does subsequent communication reinforce a supporter’s action?” Naturally, donors expect the security of a timely receipt and the courtesy of a heartfelt acknowledgement. But even more importantly, donors want information — ongoing, targeted content about what an organization is accomplishing and what is needed to tackle the next challenge.

It stands to reason that making online giving available, simple, and fulfilling is a great way to attract a new generation of donors, while helping increase acquisitions, lower the average age of donors, and increase overall revenue. But acquiring new donors is only the first step in maximizing their overall giving potential.

### Don’t Confuse Communication Channel with Giving Channel

In 2010, among organizations with above average sophisticated online giving programs, only 10 percent of gifts came in online. Analysis involving a wider range of nonprofits shows only 7.6 percent of revenue is given online.³ Yet, 69 percent of donors of all ages prefer electronic communications over print communication from nonprofits.⁴ So, it is clear that online communication cannot be confused with online giving. But why is it that online communications do not always translate into online giving? One possibility is that these donors are being trained to respond offline — many organizations have used online communication to supplement direct mail appeals, both to alert that a direct mail piece is pending or to remind that a direct mail piece was sent.
It’s true that the majority of nonprofits have more sophisticated, better funded direct mail programs than they do online marketing programs, and we know the majority of constituents enter the direct mail prospect pool as soon as interest is shown and an address is provided, whether interest was expressed online or not. So odds are that every online donor will sooner or later be given the opportunity to make a direct mail gift.

Ask yourself: How strategic is your approach to communicating with these donors? The online giving process allows you to collect more information than a simple direct mail response ever will. Email communications allow instant tests on which messages and language are most compelling. Website analytics reveal which pages, appeals, and offers are most likely to drive visitors to take action. And forms allow donors to choose via simple drop-down menu from every cause your organization funds. The challenge is to collect, analyze, and use this information to tailor the appropriate direct mail approach for your online donors.

It is reasonable to say that coordinated online communication can make direct mail more effective. Additional research should be done to understand the perfect package for combining email with direct mail and what it will take for email to drive online giving. While direct mail is still worth the larger investment it receives, donors’ preference for online communication should be honored and leveraged. If new online donors are provided offline giving opportunities that acknowledge the online relationship, build on the online communication already provided, and offer additional value (tactile experiences, more detailed information) only available or easily consumable via direct mail, the odds increase that an online donor will respond to an offline appeal. Meanwhile, the data must be used to continue enriching the online experience for those who choose to stay, or return, online.
Provide Multiple Channels for Giving to Ensure Highest Value and Retention

Almost 70 percent of donors say they prefer to receive communication via email, but less than 10 percent give online. The vast majority of bank customers have downloaded an electronic bank statement but only two out of ten bank customers have gone completely paperless. Both of these statistics reinforce that audiences have one foot in each channel and appear to like it that way. It is logical, then, to conclude that audiences appreciate the convenience and timeliness of online communication but prefer to conduct business and philanthropy offline. It is wise to cater to these preferences.

Although this preference is true today, it is unlikely to remain this way for long. From 2006 to 2009 the number of checks written fell 5.7 percent per year. Checks now make up less than one-quarter of all payments made. Again, the value of a strong integrated approach to communicating and enabling donor participation is the best way to prepare for evolving donor preferences. As the generations shift, checks disappear, and offline communication becomes less popular, organizations that focus on the message that their audience wants to hear, regardless of the medium, will win the most support.

Three Steps to Improve Multichannel Marketing

1. Assemble your leadership team around the table and have an open discussion about why you’re not doing multichannel marketing. Is it resources? Is it silos? Figure out what is in your way so you have an opportunity to remove the barriers. If your organization decides it’s not ready, but you think it’s the right thing to do, ask for a follow up meeting next quarter so you can arm yourself with data and case studies that may change their minds.

2. Baseline your performance using the 2011 donorCentrics™ Internet and Multichannel Giving Report. What percent of funds come in online
today? If your organization is behind its peer group, consider whether your email communication or your website is the culprit, and work to optimize those before spending too much time coordinating and optimizing your multichannel message.

3. When you’re ready to find the multichannel series that will improve your results, follow these steps:
   a. Choose a segment of about 10 percent of the donors that are going to receive your next direct mail piece.
   b. If you don’t have email addresses for them, consider appending them through a reputable opt-in source.
   c. Surround the direct mail drop with an email “prequel and sequel.”
   d. Compare results to your direct mail only control group.
   e. Continue testing, comparing, and optimizing.

In conclusion, realize we are working in changing times and must position ourselves for the future. While donors acquired online are less loyal than those acquired through direct mail, donors who convert to offline giving after making an initial gift online tend to maintain higher than average giving levels with similar retention rates as those for traditional direct mail donors. Online-acquired donors are significantly younger, have higher household incomes, and tend to give much larger gifts than mail-acquired donors. But as reported in the 2011 donorCentrics Internet and Multichannel Giving Benchmarking Report, “It takes the existence of a robust direct mail program to drive up the retention and long-term value of new donors acquired online. Without the ability to become multichannel givers by renewing their support via direct mail, this group of donors would be worth far less.”

Developing a strategy that enables your organization to acquire new donors online and subsequently incorporate them into your direct mail program may be the key to future fundraising success.


Appreciate and Retain
Let Your Constituents’ Feedback
Be Music to Your Ears
Chapter Four

Appreciate and Retain: Let Your Constituents’ Feedback Be Music to Your Ears

by Doug Barker

Bob Dylan said it best and set a generation in motion with his seminal song “The Times They Are a-Changin’.” It’s a concept as true in the 1960s as it is now, but while change is a constant, there are moments in time when change accelerates. In the world of fundraising, we are in one of those times. The changes in our constituents, in the economy, in donor values, in communication channels, in software capabilities, and even in the myriad choices people face each day are transforming the way we do our work.

The good news is that in times of change, there is opportunity for those who are willing to seek it. I have spent a lot of time over the past year studying what is working for organizations and thinking about what we can do to take advantage of the tides of change.

The news is not especially good. All across the fundraising landscape, donor retention is falling. Gartner Inc. reports that 75 percent of Constituent Relationship Management initiatives fail to impact the customer experience. With implementation costs high, the cost of all this failure is higher. To avoid being on the wrong end of these statistics, ask yourself: Is my organization merely harvesting value, creating value, or destroying value? I can tell you this, if you are not in creation mode, you need to refocus your energies on your individual supporters — to understand why each of them cares about you.

Agreed, this is a shift in focus for many, but it is key to navigating the challenges we face. People give their time and hard earned money for a reason; it is up to us to find out those reasons and engage our donors in
the manner they prefer. In this chapter, I offer some strategies that may help you chart a new course. And, although I am not a musician, I love music and have incorporated the music that came to me when I started putting my ideas on fundraising in today’s competitive environment down on paper.

I hope the soundtrack that accompanies these six strategies for creating success will inspire you to play along.

1. Listen and Respect

I hear Aretha Franklin and her powerful rendition of Respect when I think about what it means to truly listen to our constituents: “R-E-S-P-E-C-T, find out what it means to me.”

Often, we are so busy trying to tell our donors what we want them to know, that we forget to listen, and there are some very good reasons that we should be listening. By paying attention to what our constituents say and do, and by encouraging them to communicate with us, we can find out important information.

Begin by opening two-way communications. Provide your supporters and prospects options for communicating with you. You may be able to use some existing channels or you may have to create new vehicles that allow them to give you feedback about their preferences and interests. Email, web forms, social media, newsletters, and events all offer opportunities to attract interest and encourage response. Then, once you understand how a constituent prefers to communicate with you, you can use that information to build a relationship. Finally, what you learn about your donors has to be shared throughout your organization so you are not working at cross-purposes with another department.

Here’s a great example: Feeding America, a domestic hunger-relief charity that takes listening to and respecting their donors to a higher level, mails Donor Communication Cards to their supporters. One side of the card articulates the organization’s pledge to the supporter, outlining four key points:
• We will listen when you communicate with us and honor your requests, because we care about you and respect your decisions.

• We will promptly receipt you for your gifts so you can easily keep track of your charitable giving.

• We will report back to you in a timely manner so you know what you are accomplishing through your support.

• We will be good stewards of your gifts.

Now, that’s powerful! Additionally, the card provides both an 800 number and an email address because “if at any time you believe Feeding America is not fulfilling our pledge to you,” they want to know about. The flip side of the card lists the donor’s current communications preferences, provides easy-to-update options, and allows donors to indicate if they want to learn more about their local food bank. This provides another opportunity to deepen the relationship through volunteer opportunities.

By taking the time and effort to provide this kind of respectful open communication with their supporters, Feeding America is able to garner trust and support for their organization from the moment a donor peruses the card they received in the mail.

And even if they don’t get around to responding, they have learned something about the integrity of the organization.

2. Become Constituent Centric

We live in a consumer-driven society. Telecommunication companies, airlines, and financial institutions are all driving our expectations of how we want to be treated — and they are doing so quite effectively. If we as nonprofits want to share in their success, we have to start behaving more like for-profit businesses. True, we have a different value proposition to share, but they are setting the bar for how people want to be related to.
Here are a few ideas on how to think like a for-profit company:

- Pay attention to commercial business leaders. What opportunities do they provide for two-way communication? How do they cater to individuals? What messaging seems to be effective?

- Transcend silos within your own organization. Get over it: While you are protecting your home turf, your donors are moving on to an organization who wants to know them and what they value.

- Realize that your constituents readily cross communications channels. They may respond to a direct mail piece, not via the enclosed envelope, but by going to your website. You have to be prepared to meet them where and when they want to relate to you.

- Implement consistent and unified business processes. You can’t effectively understand your constituents unless you have a complete view of them. This takes integrated systems and business practices.

We all want loyal donors who support our missions. To acquire them and retain them, we have to get to know them and to organize our organizations around them. So, what am I hearing right now? Stevie Wonder and *You Are the Sunshine of My Life*.

### 3. Staff- Constituent Connection

We all want to be recognized, to be called by name. Think about it. Why did local residents want to go to that 1980s TV rendered Boston bar, *Cheers*, *Where Everybody Knows Your Name*? Well, that’s exactly the point—the producers created a place where people were known and welcomed. Can we create such a place, even virtually, for the people who are drawn to our causes?

I think we can. It starts, basically, with your staff. If they are not happy, if they do not understand their unique roles in the organization, or if they are not recognized for the work they do, it will be hard for them to reach out to donors and share their passion for the organization’s mission. To make
this happen, management has to ensure that staff members are connected, recognized, and rewarded. They need to take the time to celebrate small and large successes and to create an environment that fosters staff satisfaction, loyalty, advocacy, and productivity.

The Arthritis Foundation has a great story to tell that supports this point. Quite some years ago, if a disgruntled donor called to complain about the fact that he or she was getting “too much mail,” the receptionist would announce to the office that there was an angry donor on the line. If staff members all avoided the call, dreading a confrontation, Lillian, a secretary, would call out, “I’ll get it.” Although it wasn’t her job, she believed in the organization, and she knew the wonderful things it accomplished. She also understood that between mail pulls and drops, donors could easily feel they were being over-communicated to. So, no matter how often people yelled at her, she took the time to listen, to explain, and to convert. Her intrinsic loyalty and belief in the organization left every caller feeling more supportive of the Arthritis Foundation.

Why is this so important? No question about it: Customer experience depends on staff experience and happiness. The strong correlation between staff loyalty and satisfaction and customer loyalty and satisfaction has been well established in the for-profit world. As delineated in the Harvard Business Review’s *Putting the Service-Profit Chain to Work*, staff satisfaction soars when you enhance internal service quality. That is, when you equip staff with the skills, tools, and decision authority to serve customers, staff satisfaction rises, fueling productivity, and leading to greater external service value for customers, enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Importantly, the Harvard Business Review study found that a mere five percent jump in customer loyalty can boost profits from 25 to 85 percent—statistics that cannot be ignored.
An example of why it is important to empower staff members comes from the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada, where event revenue is a critical part of success and where the success of events is closely tied to the engagement of event team leads. By creating fundraising progress reports for upcoming events that include not just the number of team leads signed up, but data on those who had signed up in previous years but hadn’t done so this year — the reports now provide actionable insights. The report also gives staff the contact information for the team leads that haven’t signed up, providing the exact information needed to follow up with those proven supporters.

4. A Segment of One

In the past, we treated donor segments alike. We believed that if donors were attracted to an organization’s mission, they would support it out of a duty to do so. And for the most part, that fundamental worked. But today’s donors want to be more engaged. They want to know, “How do I partner with this organization and how does our partnership make the world a better place?” They want us to know them.

Now that is a concept! The Beatles got it right with Got to Get You into My Life, because we have to do just that. We have to engage with and converse with our donors and potentials. To get to know one another, individually, we have to have to have processes and plans in place that allow us to do so. We have to know our donors well enough to be able to contact them on their birthdays, the date of their first gift, the date of a memorial gift, or the anniversary of another significant life event.

This is a critical point. No longer can we run things on a nonprofit’s calendar. We have to incorporate into our thinking that individuals have their own calendars and their own reasons for supporting our causes. It’s up to us to learn what they are and to honor them.
5. Peer-to-Peer Advocacy

“Reach out and touch somebody’s hand; make this world a better place if you can.” These lyrics sung by Diana Ross are a perfect segue to the peer-to-peer advocacy strategy.

It’s easy to understand peer-to-peer advocacy: People value the opinions of their family, friends, colleagues, and neighbors. But in our hyper-connected, consumer-driven world, this dynamic has shifted into overdrive, and we now value product reviews by consumers that we don’t know over advertisements created by a manufacturer. We are more likely to watch videos that win in the public arena of popularity rather than those that are pushed by institutions or companies. We have to pay attention to this shift.

How do you put that practice into action by your organization? I have always been impressed with the following controlled test of personal thanks reported by Penelope Burk in Donor Centered Fundraising. With the cooperation of the Board of Directors of the Paraplegic Association of Canada, the Association captured every tenth donor in a test group. The identified donor was called by a member of the Board within 24 hours of the receipt of a gift. The caller had but one job—to thank the donor for choosing to give to the organization. If a caller was unable to reach a donor, he or she left a message. The results were clear: the test group gave, on average, 39 percent more than the control group which was not called.

Taking this powerful theory of thanking people to the next level, Chuck Longfield, chief scientist of Blackbaud, and Michal Heiplik of KUHT, Houston’s Public Broadcasting Station, conducted a rigorous test. Through meticulous data tracking of phone calls to first-time donors — in which volunteers, not Board members, contacted and thanked donors in 30-second scripted conversations, within three months of their first gift — they revealed that the thanked donors gave 44 percent more money than those not called. These impressive results, received regardless of whether the volunteer spoke with the donor or left a recorded thank you message
and whether the interaction was rated as positive, neutral, or negative, were attributed to both the growth of average gift amount and the increase in retention.

The message is clear. Donors want to be thanked. They want to be recognized. They respond to being appreciated by volunteers who represent the organization. I’d like to tell you that everyone understands this, but it’s not true. Despite a phenomenal ROI from taking the time to thank people, most nonprofit organizations do not make the effort. ALSAC/St. Jude Children’s Hospital is an exception, and they have reaped the benefits. They appropriately term their thank you calls, “Love Calls.”

In today’s connected, peer-to-peer oriented society, you also have to allow your constituents to reach out and communicate with their networks, because, quite simply, their referrals are your best acquisition strategy. Here’s where social media and online communities come in. Use software solutions to help you connect your active donors with their friends and revitalize your event and friend giving programs. Friends of friends make good supporters.

6. Nirvana

To arrive at a mutually beneficial place, you have to delight each and every one of your constituents. You have to keep them satisfied and engaged. You have to know their names. You have to help them connect to your mission. You have to foster their loyalty.

All of these things are within your reach. They will take management focus, staff empowerment, constituent knowledge, and the right software and consultative solutions, but they are possible.

At the end of the day, you want to make sure that, like James Brown, each of your constituents can say, “I feel good.”
Measure and Manage

Stop Counting. Start Measuring.
Achieve Meaningful Outcomes.
Chapter Five


by Steve MacLaughlin

Our everyday lives are full of numbers and metrics. The hours and minutes on the clock. The temperature of the water or the coffee. The expiration date on the milk. The distance to our offices. The posted speed limit on the road. The number of emails waiting in the inbox. We live in a sea of things that can be counted and metrics that can be measured. But, the fundamental question that nonprofits need to ask is: Are we counting or are we measuring? This is an important distinction because counting doesn’t actually count for very much. As it turns out, when you count things you’re usually successful. That is not always true when you start measuring things.

For example, if you are just counting things, you can only say that $537,891 was donated online to the organization last year. While that’s a number and even a statement of fact, there’s not much value in it. Not a lot of insight. It doesn’t pass the “So What and Who Cares?” test. Whereas, if you are a person who measures things, you want to know a lot more than a number. You want to know: What was the number in the past? What is it today? Where do you want it to be in the future? What’s the value of the difference? These are questions that help explain what is happening and give organizations important answers. To get the answers, you have to get comfortable with measurement.

Don't Get Emotional

Many discussions about measuring nonprofit performance elicit two emotional reactions: Defensiveness and boredom. Some people can't
separate the personal investment they've made in their work. Others can't be bothered with either qualitative or quantitative analysis.

One problem stems from the fact that many nonprofit programs and departments are measured on their performance. Budgets, jobs, and careers are all subject to how good, bad, or ugly performance is over time so when a metric shows that the organization is underperforming in an area or compared to peer organizations, people take it personally. To overcome this emotional attachment, nonprofits need to focus on the desired outcomes and processes instead of just the people involved.

Another problem has been that metrics were often very difficult to capture, track, and analyze, especially those associated with traditional offline fundraising techniques. A direct mail piece has a limited number of response metrics that can be tracked. Did the intended recipient actually get it? Did they open it? Did they read it? Did they tell others about it? Did they take any kind of action? Most of these questions are unanswerable with traditional media. At best, nonprofits know where the direct mail was sent and if a gift came in after the mailing. There’s no tracking of the actions or drop-off points, and it is unknown whether other communication channels influenced the gift.

On the other hand, interactive channels are very different. Metrics for a nonprofit’s website, email, online giving, advocacy, and social media efforts provide a much richer and more reliable set of metrics to measure than some traditional channels.

Measuring Nonprofit Performance

A discussion about measuring and managing results can't be limited to technology. As organizations evolve from measuring to benchmarking their performance it will be more important to examine other operational areas. This includes looking at financial management, fundraising, communication, social, and other measurement initiatives.
• **Financial measurement** is easy to understand: Dollars and cents, pounds and pence. No matter the sector or size of a nonprofit organization there is one common chore — bookkeeping. Financial management is also the most structured and codified areas that a nonprofit deals with. There are rules, processes, and audits. The consequences of things not adding up are more severe than just the electric bill not getting paid.

• **Fundraising measurement** often seems more like art than science. There are rules and there are unspoken rules. There are best practices and there are no practices. Organizations often rely on tribal knowledge and we-have-always-done-it-this-way approaches to measuring results. Smaller nonprofits get stuck counting things instead of measuring them. Large organizations can get lost in spreadsheets that don’t show what’s really happening.

• **Communication measurement** is a tale of two worlds. In the traditional direct marketing world, costs are high, conversion rates are low, and the feedback loop is long and limited. Then there is the interactive world that has measurable metrics overflowing, but not enough nonprofits are taking advantage of them. And there still remains the problem of knowing what to do with the analysis findings if you have them.

• **Social measurement** is still in its infancy. We’re still counting friends, likes, followers, and views. But nonprofits, or for-profits for that matter, are struggling to make it actionable. This is one area that is rapidly evolving and managing what is happening will only continue to grow in importance. While no one can predict all the twists and turns that will happen with social media it is clear that connecting online behaviors with offline profiles will be important.

Looking at operational areas is important because fragmented data and disparate systems can prevent you from connecting the dots and the dollars. Even if good measurement and benchmarking practices are going on with one program, they may be completely neglected with another. For
example, email open and click-through rates are watched like a hawk, but no one is paying attention to membership reactivation rates. The phone-a-thon program is ahead of last year's pace, but team captain retention for the walk-a-thon is a big mystery. Few nonprofit professionals would say they like managing all these different systems, but not many put the effort into getting them integrated in meaningful ways. It’s too much extra work. There’s too much inconsistency in data models. Why bother putting in the effort?

Three major trends are shaping the increased importance of managing and measuring a nonprofit's performance.

1. Technology is no longer a limiting factor to integrating systems.
2. Benchmarking is making performance management more meaningful.
3. Operational excellence is shifting to outcome measurement.

Let's take a closer look at all three of these areas and how they are transforming the nonprofit sector.

Integrated Systems

It used to be that you bought a fundraising system, a prospect research system, an accounting system, and another system for direct mail, along with several different tools to manage a website, send email, collect online donations, and tweet about everything you're doing. These fragmented systems each belonged to different parts of the organization. Everyone was living happily in his or her own silo until someone had the nerve to ask what was happening. In many cases, it was a supporter who wanted information that was kept in multiple places. Of course, the supporter didn’t know that technological and departmental silos that were in place.

Thankfully technology is no longer the limiting factor. Nonprofit organizations can now integrate their front office, back office, box office, and online office together. It's not the tools that need to change. It’s
the attitudes. A focus on the mission of the organization should help to eliminate the fiefdoms and kingdoms created over time. Integrated systems allow for holistic measurement of what is happening across multiple programs and channels. They remove the objections and limitations from measuring and managing nonprofit performance.

**Nonprofit Benchmarking**

Here is what you need to know about benchmarking: If you and I were both being chased by a bear, I wouldn’t try to outrun the bear. I would try to outrun you. That’s benchmarking. Benchmarks help nonprofits understand how changes in technology, the economy, and user preferences are impacting performance across peer organizations. Trends specific to your organization’s sector are often covered in benchmark studies. For example, higher education institutions have different benchmarks than environmental organizations, and nonprofits heavily engaged in advocacy may not have a lot of use for benchmarks around membership renewals.

The growth of benchmarking in the nonprofit sector is transforming performance measurement. Organizations now have the ability to measure their performance against peer organizations. Are we doing better or worse than other nonprofits in our sector? What is happening in other sectors that we can learn from? Benchmarking is the next big step after a solid measurement program is in place. It is very important that benchmarks are used in combination with your own performance measurement, not as a substitute for measuring your own nonprofit’s progress. Understanding whether or not your performance is above or below the benchmark can help provide a useful reality check.

**Outcome Measurement**

For the longest time most performance measurement has been for internal use only. Even the growth of benchmarking has kept the most meaningful results behind closed doors. But the combination of increased demand
for greater transparency, allegations of donor intent being ignored, and outcome-focused giving websites is changing things. Nearly all surveys of donors show that they want more information about where their gifts are going, and they are moving away from unrestricted giving. It’s not whether you spent the money or not — it’s about what happened when you did spend it.

Online sites like Kiva®, DonorsChoose.org, and GlobalGiving are receiving millions of dollars in online micro-loans and donations. They connect donors directly to projects and the outcomes are front and center. Some nonprofits, like Room to Read, combine traditional fundraising practices with outcome-based measurements, demonstrating that it is possible to be successful doing both. Younger donors have a very different perspective about how they give and it’s all about showing outcomes. The “where most needed” approach to asking for donations is quickly becoming a thing of the past.

Putting It All Together

Getting more from measuring performance requires a culture adjustment for many organizations. The good news is that it is possible for you to start using performance metrics and transform how you produce outcomes. The bad news is that there’s no magic wand or set of shortcuts to get you there. Technology is a tool that can help make the transition easier, but it will take leadership and attention within your organization.

Creating a culture of performance measurement can also be assisted by linking goals and outcomes. People get excited and engaged about metrics only when they are tied to people and things important to the organization. Not everyone in the organization has to understand all the technical mechanics involved in the measurement process. Every strategic goal should have measurable outcomes, and every personal goal should have clear outcomes that matter to the mission.
Part of developing a culture for measurement and metrics is having a framework. Focusing on the audience, their behaviors, and outcomes is the basis for a solid metrics framework that you can start using immediately. Who are you targeting? Is it donors, alumni, members, activists, subscribers, volunteers, parents, lapsed donors, event fundraisers, or a host of other supporter types? What are the desired outcomes and why are they important to your organization and these audiences?

Start anywhere. Go everywhere. The key to getting started is often to just get started. Select an audience and behaviors that result in outcomes. Focus on measuring — not counting. Use benchmarks to compare your performance against other peer organizations. Create a culture of performance measurement by tying outcomes to goals. Use technology to make it easier but get leverage through leadership.
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Allison Van Diest has been a marketing professional for more than a decade. Over the course of her career, she has made the transition from marketing “artist” to marketing “scientist” by uncovering ways to measure the impact of marketing in the organizations she has served. Recently, Allison has been involved in marketing Blackbaud’s Internet Solutions division, which provides Internet solutions, marketing strategy, and creative assistance to a wide variety of nonprofit customers. She holds a B.A. in English from Florida State University and an M.B.A. from The Citadel. You can reach Allison at Allison.VanDiest@blackbaud.com.
About Blackbaud and the Desktop Reference Series

Blackbaud is the leading global provider of software and services designed specifically for nonprofit organizations, enabling them to improve operational efficiency, build strong relationships, and raise more money to support their missions. Approximately 24,000 organizations — including The American Red Cross, Cancer Research UK, Earthjustice, International Fund for Animal Welfare, Lincoln Center, The Salvation Army, The Taft School, Tulsa Community Foundation, Ursinus College, the WGBH Educational Foundation, and Yale University — use one or more Blackbaud products and services for fundraising, constituent relationship management, financial management, website management, direct marketing, education administration, ticketing, business intelligence, prospect research, consulting, and analytics. Since 1981, Blackbaud’s sole focus and expertise has been partnering with nonprofits and providing them the solutions they need to make a difference in their local communities and worldwide. Headquartered in the United States, Blackbaud also has operations in Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Target Analytics, a division of Blackbaud, is the leading provider of comprehensive analytics solutions for donor acquisition, prospect research, fundraising performance, and collaborative peer benchmarking to help nonprofits maximize fundraising results at every stage of the donor lifecycle.

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The Supporter Journey Desktop Reference Book educates nonprofit organizations on building and maintaining relationships throughout the supporter lifecycle.

With chapters by industry leaders and Blackbaud experts, this book is the go-to reference for nonprofits to understand each supporter’s complete relationship with their organization.

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